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Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES UNDER ARTICLE 18 OF THE CONVENTION

Second Periodic Reports of States Parties

Addendum

VENEZUELA

[redacted]

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The fundamental objective of the present report is to present a summary account of the progress made by Venezuela between 1985 and 1988 in following the guidelines of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

Although the State of Venezuela has been developing during the last few years a series of policies calculated to guarantee equal opportunities for women so that they can both progress fully as human beings and participate at all levels in the country's development, there remain a series of obstacles which prevent a significant improvement in this field. These obstacles are beyond the control of the State and condition the long-term effectiveness of the actions taken.

The main obstacle which has to be overcome is undoubtedly the whole system of values, beliefs and models which assert the inequality between men and women, assigning to the latter a role and status which degrade them as human beings. These values are deeply embedded in the bulk of the population, regardless of sex, and are institutionalized in the entire social, legal and economic structures of our society.

Another obstacle, which is actually related to the above, is the inadequacy of the human and economic resources assigned to the development and promotion of the programmes and projects intended for the status of women.

The economic crisis which has affected the country during the past few years has also affected the budget for the State's social policies, policies that include those intended for the status of women, which are thus not being granted sufficient resources to ensure a maximum coverage of the programmes as well as a deeper level for them, and especially their efficient supervision and evaluation.

Nevertheless, and in spite of these obstacles, it is possible to cite a number of most significant policies developed by the State for the advancement of women in the realm of social, legal, economic and political equality.

In the first place, there are the organizational policies destined to create an environment for the planning, elaboration, development and evaluation of the programmes directed at the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women. We thus have:

1. The creation of the Ministry for the Family in 1987 as a focal point for the social policies of the central State of Venezuela directed at the family as a basic social unit as well as to each of its members. Through this Ministry, the State social policies are co-ordinated with other agencies and institutions, both national and international, governmental and non-governmental, so as to ensure that the actions undertaken have a greater coherence, dynamism and scope. Moreover, the Ministry for the Family formulates, develops and evaluates projects and programmes attending to the basic needs of the family in general, and of women, children, young persons and the aged in particular.

In spite of its recent creation, the Ministry has conquered a space for the family and its members as subjects of development, projecting the importance of its work in this field upon the whole of society.

It is also from this Ministry that most of the legal, economic and political actions destined to ensure the equality of women have been co-ordinated, more particularly from the Ministry's Sectoral Directorate for the Promotion of Women.

2. The creation in 1987 of the General Sectoral Directorate for the Promotion of Women under the Ministry for the Family.

The General Sectoral Directorate for the Promotion of Women is the main authority of the National (central) Government in charge of the formulation, co-ordination and supervision of programmes and projects directed at the achievement of an effective participation of women in the country's socio-economic, cultural and political spheres and in the promotion of their social and political rights.

The origin of the General Sectoral Directorate for the Promotion of Women goes back to 1974 when the Advisory Committee for Women to the Presidency of the Republic was set up in order to enhance and guarantee a greater and fairer participation of women in the various aspects of the life of the nation. Subsequently, a new Government decided to establish in 1979 a Ministry of State for the Participation of Women in Development, in order to devise policies for including women in the plans for national development. Then in 1984, following the recommendations of the Regional Intergovernmental Preparatory Meeting organized by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean for the World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade of Women and of the OAS Inter-American Commission for Women, the National Women's Office was created and placed under the Ministry for Youth. This Office started as an advisory body in charge of co-ordinating the work on the evaluation of the Decade for Women in Venezuela. This work served as a basis for the same Office to put forward projects relating to an effective integration of women in development and to start a number of programmes in various different social areas. When the Ministry for Youth was superseded by the present Ministry for the Family and when the National Women's Office became the General Sectoral Directorate for the Promotion of Women, that Directorate took up the projects and programmes which were being developed by the National Women's Office and, along with other plans, strengthened the State's role in the management of nation-wide social policies directed at the population, thus giving the governmental work in favour of women a greater depth, organic strength and legitimacy.

3. One of the most important achievements in the work undertaken since 1984 has been the organizing of the advisory Committees of the General Sectoral Directorate for the Promotion of Women. These are six committees consisting of persons who are highly qualified in their respective fields of activity, and who belong to all the political trends in national life and include the sectors of Education, Labour, Legislation, Social Communication, Health and Political Participation. This group of volunteers, most of whom are women working in the various committees, have the task of advising the Ministry for the Family and the General Sectoral Directorate for the Promotion of Women in the formulation of projects and investigations, as well as the elaboration of policies for the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women in each of the above-mentioned sectors, establishing priorities and strategies to be followed in the next few years.

This pluralistic and interdisciplinary work that has been developed in the Advisory Committees is part of an effort to guarantee the participation of women in the planning, development and evaluation of State policies directed at them. The emphasis has been placed on the need for team work, and on the need to lay down political and ideological positions when working in favour of women.

These committees are the outcome of the meetings held to evaluate the results of the Decade of Women in Venezuela organized by the National Women's Office, which served as a basis for the document presented by our country to the World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade of Women, held at Nairobi in 1985. As from that moment, these advisory bodies have been gathering strength until 1987, when each of the participants was sworn in by Mrs. Virginia Olivo de Celli, Minister for the Family, who requested their co-operation to elaborate plans of action in each of the above-mentioned sectors, plans which would then serve for the Ministry as a whole as points of departure to deal with the problems of Venezuelan families.

At present, 150 persons are taking part in these committees and the plans of action of each one of them are summarized in a publication entitled "National Policy Directed at the Development and Promotion of Women in Venezuela (report of the Advisory Committees 1984-1988)" published by the General Sectoral Directorate for the Promotion of Women.

Second, an account is given below of the actual policies put forward by these bodies to foster the equality for women.

The following may be mentioned:

In the realm of the law:

1. Partial Reform of the Penal Code

A large number of women and specialists in the legal field were convened by the National Women's Office in order to carry out a careful examination of the provisions of criminal law in force and of a proposal for reform prepared by distinguished criminal lawyers; the meeting produced a document proposing reforms on those points which are considered to affect the rights of women.

Among the new proposals elaborated by this group, mention may be made of the following:

1. The elimination of the article which provides for mitigation of the penalty against a man who rapes a "woman of ill-repute"; it is proposed that, with regard to the penalty for rape, there should be no difference between one woman victim and another. Furthermore, it is proposed that the concept and denomination of "woman of ill-repute" be struck out of our entire legislation, considering that it has a discriminatory ethical connotation which conflicts with the postulates of our National Constitution.

2. The need to review the legal provisions making adultery a criminal offence, since the existing legislation restricts the application of the principle of unity of affiliation established by the reform of the Civil Code (1982). Any married person who has a child as a result of extra-marital relations will at present refrain from legally acknowledging that child for fear providing evidence of the criminal offence of adultery: the risk of being sent to prison will make the parent refrain from regularizing the child's status.

3. That abortion should cease to be a punishable offence in the following cases:

- when it is performed for medical reasons as an indispensble means of saving the pregnant woman's life, or in order to avoid her physical harm or even mental harm;

- when it is necessary for eugenic reasons in order to avoid the transmission of serious physical and mental deformities to the unborn child; in the case of incest or when the mother or father suffer from oligophrenia or epilepsy and at least three specialists suspect damage to the foetus. Likewise, when the mother has been exposed to radiations liable to cause physical or mental damage to the foetus.

- in the case of rape: when the pregnancy is the result of a rape and the offence has been fully established;

4. Making domestic ill-treatment between spouses a punishable offence, i.e. in the case of a continuing ill-treatment causing harm to the other spouse. "Ill-treatment" is understood to mean acts that cause physical, psychological or moral suffering, humiliation, harm or abuse that is degrading to the dignity of the person.

2. Reform of the Labour Law

The proposals for the amendment of the Labour Law are the outcome of the discussion by women familiar with the subject of a proposal for reform presented by Dr. Rafael Caldera to the Congress of the Republic. The National Women's Office co-ordinated the discussion of the law and a document was produced which was submitted to the Congress of the Republic for consideration.

The proposals for amendment relate to the following:

1. Those provisions which, on the pretext of protecting women, limit their access to jobs, namely those referring to the prohibition of employment in certain categories of jobs and for night work. Regarding these prohibitions, it is proposed that working women be allowed the freedom, at their own risk, of choosing among the various categories of jobs available in the labour market.

2. There are other articles which limit the participation of women: those which deal with the protection of motherhood as a feminine condition and not as a social function. As far as this limitation is concerned, it has been proposed to introduce a special chapter concerning the Protection of Motherhood and the Family, which will specify that the duration of the pre-natal and post-natal leave from work be revised for both natural and adoptive mothers. It is also proposed to prohibit the dismissal of pregnant working women and to broaden the range of services of the institutions for child care, by means of agreements between employers, workers and government bodies.

3. It is proposed to introduce into the labour legislation provisions that will prohibit discrimination in employment on the grounds of sex, marital status, family situation or responsibilities, or physical, psychic or sensory limitations which are not disabling from work.

4. It is proposed to introduce other important norms, as follows: a preference in the allocation of jobs in favour of heads of family, regardless of sex; steps to protect the co-ownership of the marital community's assets, including a norm which will permit the withholding of up to 50 per cent of a male or female worker's remuneration during the period of married life or concubinage for the benefit of the other spouse or concubine; measures to grant housewives the same social and economic benefits as those granted to women employed in other categories of work.

It must be noted that although the proposals to amend the Penal Code and the Labour Law have been submitted to Congress in 1986 and 1987 respectively, they have yet to be discussed in substance by it; their approval is not expected in the near future.

Having thus given a brief summary of the legal situation of women and the various proposals thereon, it must be pointed out that, for any advances in this field to be really effective, the necessary social conditions must exist for the benefits of equality to be actually enjoyed. One of these conditions is that these legislative provisions be known to the population, and that access to the judicial bodies be available in the State of Venezuela for their effective enforcement. They nevertheless represent necessary rules of conduct which are gradually asserting themselves.

Although these reforms have not yet been approved, the General Sectoral Directorate for the Promotion of Women, through its Legal Assistance Directorate, is developing two programmes related to legal assistance for women:

1. Protection of the Family Against Ill-Treatment
2. Legal Assistance Network.

These two programmes are intended to create precedents with regard to legal assistance in many of those aspects in which reforms have been proposed.

1. Protection of the Family against Ill-Treatment

This is a programme which originated in 1985 in the National Women's Office and is intended to deal with the problem of ill-treatment within the family nucleus and to ensure that it is reported to, and punished by, the competent judicial authorities.

The basic purpose of the programme is to contribute to the protection of the members of the Venezuelan family and to afford them guidance towards more humane relations and the practice of solidarity.

With this general purpose in mind the following objectives were set for the programme:

1. To inform the Venezuelan population of the grave character of the phenomenon of ill-treatment within the family, its causes, the forms which it takes and its consequences.

2. To disseminate among the population the knowledge of the laws, regulations and codes which protect the family and its various members from ill-treatment.

3. To provide direct assistance to the victims of ill-treatment and channel their complaints to the appropriate bodies.

4. To ascertain, through the various cases attended to, the characteristic features and the degree of intensity of the ill-treatment in the various regions of the country, with the aim of providing feed-back material for the preliminary outlines and starting points of the programme.

The programme functions on the basis of a convention signed with all the State Governments of the Venezuelan federation; accordingly, the civil prefectures and/or headquarters of each federated State receive and direct, as the agencies closest to the community, the complaints for ill-treatment within families and promote, jointly with the Legal Assistance Directorate, sensitizing working groups within the community where the problems of

ill-treatment are examined. The programme has thus a preventive purpose, which is being developed in these working groups, as well as the purpose of recording those cases of ill-treatment which occur in the various States and seeing that they are punished.

It must be pointed out that the programme covers also the training of the staff of the civil prefectures and/or headquarters throughout the country in order to ensure that an effective attention is given to cases of ill-treatment; it also includes the training of voluntary staff in order to create a multiplier effect among the sensitizing working groups in the various districts of the country.

From 1985 until the first semester of 1988, the programme has been implemented in all the States of the country in a continuing manner, thus enabling it to take roots in these States. To this date, 113 working groups have been organized at the central level, involving the participation of a total of 3,051 persons, most of them leaders of their communities, without counting the working groups for the training of multipliers and the working groups organized in the various States with local human and material resources.

The Programme for the Protection of the Family against Ill-Treatment has two material supports: the Basic Legal Information Manual and National Directory of Services and the People's Manual (most frequent cases of ill-treatment).

2. Legal Assistance Network

In the middle of 1987, this programme began to function with the aim of co-ordinating the nation-wide network of governmental and non-governmental agencies carrying out the work of promotion, defence and dissemination of the legal norms protecting the family and/or giving legal assistance free of charge to the population, especially women.

The Legal Assistance Directorate is intended to function as a co-ordinating body for this network, promoting meetings with agencies and institutions such as the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Labour, the Office of the Public Prosecutor General of the Republic, the Labour Inspectorate, the Prisons Administration, the National Women's Guidance Institute, the National Institute for Assistance to Minors, the Forensic Technical Service of the Police, the Venezuelan Federation of Women Lawyers, with the aim of guaranteeing to women in general, a fair and just treatment, in particular for working women, ill-treated women, women victims of sexual abuse, pregnant women and women prisoners.

In addition, the Legal Assistance Directorate possesses a Free Legal Advice Service to deal with cases of persons in need of legal advice. The basic task of this service is to offer initial attention so as to direct each case to the competent bodies, and then follow it through.

Future activities in the legal field for the achievement of equality for women and their incorporation into the country's social and economic process include the following:

1. To elaborate guidelines on tax legislation in favour of women heads of household.

2. To elaborate guidelines on the economic value of housework with the aim of including housewives in the social security programmes.

3. To pursue the study of guidelines on the reform of the Income Tax Law in order to favour families and taxpayers who support handicapped family members.

4. To ensure the enforcement of the legal provisions relating to the creation of day-nurseries, and to urge official bodies to establish them, in those employing more than 30 women.

5. To continue supporting the Ministry for the Family in pressing Congress for the approval of the proposals for the amendment of the Penal Code and of the Labour Law.

6. To prepare the second Family Legislation Meetings.

7. To draft the publications of the Ministry for the Family on the rights of women and the family.

In the Social Field:

1. The national policy directed at the mass communication media, which has stressed the promotion of equal opportunities and treatment for women, the reconsideration of the masculine and feminine stereotypes which prevent the integration of women in the world of labour, and the promotion of the idea that men can perform activities hitherto considered as household duties or as pertaining exclusively to women.

In this sense, it has been possible to disseminate the following via the media:

1.1. Micros produced by the International Labour Office (ILO) on the equality of the sexes with regard to work, which have been re-edited in the light of Venezuelan realities.

1.2. Micros produced by the Ministry for the Family: (a) Sexual education for children, in which the prevailing sexual stereotypes are confronted. (b) The various stages in the family life cycle, in which more democratic models of family life are put forward.

1.3. In addition, a project has been proposed by the Advisory Committee on Mass Communication Media of the General Sectoral Directorate for the Promotion of Women of the Ministry for the Family to the different media of the country, so that these can promote a different image both of the Venezuelan women and of the Venezuelan family.

2. The psycho-social assistance programmes, whose fundamental purpose is to promote the appreciation of the feminine role and enhance the participation of women in society:

2.1. The Workshop to Promote Motivation and Self-Esteem.

2.2. The Workshop on Female Leadership.

2.3. Family Education.

2.1. <u>The Workshop to Promote Motivation and Self-Esteem</u>

The aim of this programme is to make the participants realize the effects on the human being and on social action of the manner in which one perceives, values and evaluates oneself. The finality is to promote internal changes which will make persons feel able to act in the dynamics of society and confront models and values that produce inequality and discrimination, helping them at the same time to develop personally and professionally.

This progamme is offered throughout the entire territory of the country and is run by specialized voluntary personnel working for the Directorate. The ultimate idea of this programme is to train, in the various districts of the country, human resources capable of multiplying the self-esteem workshop, level I, in the various communities and thus reach a maximum number of people.

There are three levels in the Self-Esteem Workshop, to guarantee an adequate selection and training process of the human resources suited for the treatment of the topic.

The first level is directed at the community, and its objective is to "acquaint the participants with the topic, giving information on the definition, the training process and the levels of self-esteem ...".

The second level has as its objective to "sensitize and enhance self-esteem and favour the taking of decisions ... going deeper into the knowledge of the topic and the participants' self-knowledge, in order to select those best suited and desirous of being trained for multiplying the level I workshop."

The third level goes deeper into the knowledge of the topic and the techniques of group management, since its aim is to train facilitators capable of multiplying the Self-Esteem Workship, level I, in the community.

The objectives, programmes and guidelines of the facilitators at the various levels of the self-esteem workshop are set forth in a publication of the General Sectoral Directorate called "The Workshop to Promote Motivation and Self-Esteem".

2.2. Workshop on Female Leadership

The aim of this programme is to cause Venezuelan women to reflect on the limitations and obstacles facing them in their various tasks, in order to ensure for them a position consonant with their efforts, dedication and capacity, and at the same time provide them with tools to ensure for them a more profitable relationship with the groups in which they operate, thereby promoting their personal development and that of those with whom they interact.

The Workshop on Feminine Leadership is operated by women trained by the General Sectoral Directorate for the Promotion of Women, working on a voluntary basis throughout the territory of the country.

This workshop has been designed for the purpose of operating at two levels. The first of these levels is directed at the community and its object is to make participants aware of what is a leader and what elements go to make a leader, thus enabling them to evaluate their own action as leaders and to identify the elements which can contribute to a better exercise of leadership.

The second level is intended to train the facilitators by concentrating on the theory of the subject, the recognition and evaluation of their own leadership action and the management of group dynamics.

All the information concerning the justification, programmes and guidelines for the two levels of the Workshop on Female Leadership appears in a publication entitled "Workshop on Female Leadership".

2.3. Family education

This programme contributes to the training of professionals in the areas of family education, sexual education, family planning and education of the family for community life; its aim is to ensure that these professionals will promote the setting up of schools for parents for the purpose of sharing with

the community their experiences relating to the domestic environment, the family and the community with respect to health, education, nutrition, consumption, husband-and-wife relations, parental relations and other problems which have to be faced in the daily life of all homes.

In political matters

1. There has been an intensive mobilization in the last two years of the women of the country for the purpose of ensuring a greater political participation at the higher levels of representation and decision-making.

During these past 30 years of democratic rule, Venezuelan women, although they have become more deeply involved in the development of the country and have participated more actively in all sectors of national life, representing as they do one half of the militants of the main Venezuelan political organizations, and also a major force in the trade unions, neighbourhood associations and professional associations, have nevertheless not been able to conquer executive and decision-making posts in a percentage corresponding to their qualitative and quantitative share in the life of the nation.

For example, in the Congress of the Republic, from the 1963 elections until the last elections held in 1983, only three women senators have been elected (see table 1). In the Chamber of Deputies, the largest number of women deputies elected for a constitutional period is 12 (the number elected in 1983) out of a total of 200 seats, thus representing only 6 per cent of the total number of deputies (see table 2).

Table 1

Congress of the Republic

Senate

Year of election	No. of seats	Women	Men
1963	47	-	47
1968	52	1	51
1973	47	-	47
1978	44	2	42
1983	44	-	44

Table 2

Congress of the Republic

Deputies

Year of election	No. of seats	Women	Men
1963	178	6	172
1968	214	6	208
1973	200	6	194
1979	199	9	190
1983	200	12	188

The General Sectoral Directorate for the Promotion of Women has prepared a document giving an account, for the last 30 years of democratic rule, of the political participation of Venezuelan women; it shows women's participation in the Legislature, the Executive and the Judiciary as well as the presence of women in the governing bodies of workmen's organizations, trade unions and professional associations. In this document, entitled "Participation of Venezuelan Women in Politics" (1988), the conclusion is reached that although Venezuelan women have been present in the various branches of Government of the country, that participation has not been, quantitatively speaking, representative of the extent of the work and activities performed by women during the 30 years of democratic rule. At the same time, the gains made in this field have not been the result of mere chance or of the goodwill of any party or government. Despite the obstacles preventing the full participation of women in politics, which are many and difficult to combat and overcome, women have fought in order to conquer new areas and have shown that they are capable of organizing themselves to demand a greater participation in the conduct of the country's affairs.

The Ministry for the Family, through the General Sectoral Directorate for the Promotion of Women, has been able to contribute in recent years to the search for a fairer and more equal political space for women. It has not only urged the group of women leaders who form the Advisory Committees to work on a pluralist and democratic basis but it has also developed programmes such as that for the promotion of motivation and self-esteem and for female leadership intended to provide women with individual tools to facilitate their access to higher levels of action and decision.

These programmes have been accompanied by actions of great diversity which it is believed will, as circumstances permit, have some impact on the participation of women. In the course of the year 1988, the Ministry for the Family has brought together the women leaders who form part of the Advisory Committees and the members of political and social groups active in the country for the purpose of preparing a minimum common programme for Venezuelan women leaders of political parties, which was submitted to the chief candidates to the Presidency of the Republic (among them Mrs. Ismenia de Villalba, the first woman candidate to the Presidency of the Republic) and the general secretaries of the political organizations, in which a series of alternative suggestions were put forward directed at ensuring a greater participation by women in the conduct and management of national affairs. This document starts with a brief summary of the past and present position of Venezuelan women in political affairs during the years of democratic rule and goes on to propose:

"1. That every political party should adopt, for the representation of women, a system of percentage quotas proportional to the number of women militants in the party. We propose that the quota should be not lower than 30 per cent of candidacies to decision-making posts with a high probability of election.

2. That conditions should be created, in conformity with the statutes of the political parties, to promote a greater participation by qualified women on a basis of equality; these conditions must be incorporated and upheld in the platform of government proposed by each candidate, which must include an overall strategy intended to ensure the participation of women.

3. That the political parties should intensify their efforts to promote and ensure equal participation by women in all national and local legislative bodies so as to assure fairness in the appointment, election and promotion of women to high positions in the executive, legislative and judicial branches.

4. That, for purposes of formulating policies, plans and programmes intended for women, there should be a broad involvement of all the agencies and persons engaged in the promotion of women, as is done at6present with the Advisory Committees of the Ministry for the Family. Lastly, we call upon all the political parties and their women militants to promote the advancement and in-depth progress of the legal reforms already proposed and the programmes for the assistance and promotion of women already in existence at present. We appeal likewise to the women militants of the various political organizations of the country, and in particular those occupying important positions, to take action and to give concrete shape to these proposals." (Minimum Common Programme of the Venezuelan Women Leaders submitted to the political parties)

This programme was favourably received by the candidates and general secretaries of the various parties when the lady Minister for the Family submitted it to them in private meetings, in the company of the women members of the committees and women leaders of the organizations themselves. Nevertheless, when the time came to prepare the lists of candidates to Congress in order to present them to the voters in December 1989, the proposals contained in the document were not given any great consideration.

Precisely at the time when the composition of the lists of candidates was being discussed within the various parties, Mrs. Virginia Olivo de Celli, Minister for the Family, returned from the Inter-American Seminar on the Preparation of Strategies for Women's Participation in Politics (the lady Minister is the principal delegate for Venezuela to the Inter-American Commission of Women) and she immediately convened the Advisory Committees to submit to them for discussion the Plan of Action for the Full and Equal Participation of Women in Politics, which was the final document of the Inter-American Seminar. As a result of the discussion of the Plan and in view of the contingency which was jeopardizing any concrete progress in the matter, the women decided to convene national assemblies of women to discuss the Plan of Action proposed by the Inter-American Commission of Women as well as the situation which was developing in the political parties and which amounted to the exclusion of women rather than their incorporation in the stated percentages in leading positions in the electoral lists for seats in the Congress of the Republic and the legislative bodies of the federated States. Seventeen Assemblies were held in the various States of the country, all of them attended by a large number of women, not only militants in all the various political groups but also independent women, as well as those working in non-govermental organizations which assist and promote women. The various assemblies adopted decisions on the action to be taken in their respective States. In Caracas, the capital, women decided to form a united women's front entitled "United Women Leaders", subordinating their different political allegiances to the common interest; they succeeded in mobilizing women in various areas in order to exert pressure at election time and carry out actions to promote the participation of women. The women of Caracas proposed that a National Women's March should take place to protest against the political situation of Venezuelan women. The march was carried out on 2 August 1988 and constituted one of the most important actions carried out by

Venezuelan women under democracy. In principle, it was obtained as a result that a greater number of women should get seats in the National Congress and in the State Legislative Assemblies; a precedent was thus set in the struggle and mobilization in unity and agreements were reached for the election of a significantly greater number of women at the forthcoming elections in representative posts (Municipal Councillors, Mayors, Governors) by mid-1989.

With these actions, Venezuelan women demonstrated that they were ready and willing to fulfil their commitment to carry out, jointly with men and under equal conditions, the difficult task of constructing a just and democratic country.

In economic matters:

1. The elaboration of programmes for the promotion of small businesses managed by women.

These programmes are as follows:

1.1 Programme for the incorporation into the productive process of young persons and women with low incomes.

1.2 Management Training Workshop for Women Workers.

1.1 Incorporation into the productive process of young persons and women with low incomes

This programme has been set up by the Ministry for the Family and has been co-ordinated by the General Sectoral Directorate for the Care of Young Persons of the same Ministry in 1987 for the purpose of granting loans to low-income women and young persons in order to enable them to develop viable small businesses and to guarantee to them an improved level of living.

The selection of the persons who are to benefit from these credits, as well as the granting of loans and their follow-up are the responsibility of a number of institutions which function in the various federated States of the country and which form a State inter-institutional commission. Economic feasibility is ensured through the Fund for the Operation and Financing of Associative Enterprises, under the supervision of the Ministry for the Family; its resources come from contributions by State bodies, various public and private institutions and international organizations.

1.2 Management Training Workshop for Working Women

This workshop has been conceived and developed by the General Sectoral Directorate for the Promotion of Women of the Ministry for the Family with the aim of fostering the incorporation into productive activities of low-income Venezuelan women. Considering that domestic activities impose serious limitations upon women for their vocational training and their incorporation into the labour market, this workshop provides an opportunity for women to acquire the knowledge and skills which are essential for the purpose of managing efficiently small production units. This offers women a concrete opportunity to participate in the development of the country.

The workshop operates at two levels. At the first level, it works directly with persons interested in developing production units; at the second, it trains the persons who will act as multipliers of that first level.

With regard to this workshop, there have been three publications by the General Sectoral Directorate for the Promotion of Women: "Manual of Management Training for Working Women"; "Legal aspects for the establishment of an enterprise" and the "Facilitators Manual".

2. Assistance programme for working mothers

2.1 Day nurseries

This programme of the Ministry for the Family has been developed by the General Sectoral Directorate for the Care of Children and has been operating throughout the territory of the country since 1984. Its purpose is to give a formal shape to the relations of solidarity and comradeship which exist in the various neighbourhoods in Venezuela. There, a woman in the community will offer to look after a number of children (approximately five children) at her home while the mothers of those children are at work. The purpose of the programme is to give assistance to those mothers from the economic point of view and also in human resources, as well as to provide training for the women who give the service in question, with the aim of ensuring the continuity of that service and a better care for the children concerned.

The aim of the programme is to help on the one hand the women who take care of the children by providing them with resources that will convert their work into a remunerated activity for them and, on the other hand, to solve the problem of the numerous mothers who do not know where to leave their children between the ages of 0 and 6 years of age when they themselves are at work.

A programme similar to that of the Ministry for the Family is being operated by the Children's Foundation, an institution presided over by the First Lady of the Republic. There are also a number of other institutions which provide care for very small children. Unfortunately, despite all this effort, there are still 2 million children of pre-school age without any care.

The struggle for the equality of women is a difficult one but in Venezuela it has progressively asserted itself as a necessity not only for the Venezuelan State and the federated State governments but also for the women themselves who are constantly demanding higher levels of participation; their non-governmental organizations have been strengthened and their links with State bodies working in favour of women are becoming closer, as the sole means of expanding the programmes and completing the legal reforms - and any other reforms - necessary to make significant progress in this field.